

# Center for Youth Leadership

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*Why wait for someone else to make a difference?*

**Connecticut Legislature  
Public Health Committee  
*Testimony in Support of HB 5131:  
An Act Establishing a Task Force on  
Nail Salons and Nail Technicians  
February 16, 2016***

*Keily Calderon and Bob Kocienda*

Hello Senator Gerratana, Representative Ritter and members of the committee. We have a special greeting for Representative Wilms, who represents our hometown of Norwalk.

My name is Keily Calderon and this is Bob Kocienda. We are members of the Center for Youth Leadership at Brien McMahon High School in Norwalk. On behalf of our 145 members, we are here to testify in support of *HB 5131, An Act Establishing a Task Force on Nail Salons and Nail Technicians*. We also represent the Mayor's Youth Leadership Council, which is our partner in Stamford. They participated in the research we've conducted of nail salons since June 2015. This is winter break for Stamford schools, so members of the council could not be with us today.

The Center for Youth Leadership and the Mayor's Youth Leadership Council address several social issues, including the rights of immigrants, which includes day laborers, students who do not have papers, domestic workers and nail salon workers. Our work includes direct service; public awareness initiatives; and social change campaigns that influence policies and laws.

Our support of HB 5131 is based on conversations with workers at twenty-two nail salons in Norwalk and Stamford; conversations, by the way, that are ongoing. In conversations with our members, workers reported exploitation in terms of wages and safety conditions. For example:

- ◆ workers in 19 of the 22 salons reported wage abuse, with some workers earning as little as \$3.50 an hour for a 10-hour workday. Others earned more per hour, but still nowhere near the minimum wage of \$9.60; workers in less than a handful of salons reported earning the minimum wage plus tips;
- ◆ just about all of the workers reported that tips were calculated into their hourly wage, which is against state law;
- ◆ many workers reported that they were expected to interrupt their lunch break if clients came into the salon; and
- ◆ others reported that they were sent home without pay on days when clients were far and few between, which is against state labor law.

Just as troubling were practices that could compromise workers' health and safety. According to the federal Occupational Safety and Health Administration (OSHA), salon products can expose nail salon workers to hazardous chemicals. *"Workers may breathe in the harmful vapors, dusts, or mists; get the product on their skin or in their eyes; or swallow the product if it is accidentally transferred onto food or cigarettes. Working in a nail salon exposes workers to many different chemicals each day. These exposures can 'add up,' especially when many products are being used at the same time, the products are used day after day, or when there is poor ventilation in the salon"* (1).

OSHA requires employers to provide information and training to workers about the potential hazards of the chemicals and how to use, transport and store the products safely. Of all the workers we spoke to, not one knew anything about the OSHA required *material safety data sheet* and not one could remember an employer or manager reviewing it. Also, while some workers use gloves and masks, the large majority do not and those that do do so inconsistently.

We presented these findings to the Trafficking in Persons Council, which is chaired by the Permanent Commission on the Status of Women. And just last month we used them to successfully lobby the Norwalk Department of Health to revise its nail salon inspection protocol. The changes include:

1. a training course on worker safety at the time a salon is opened and once every two years thereafter;
2. written confirmation that employers have reviewed the material safety data sheet with each employee;
3. a grading system similar to the one used by New York City's Department of Health for restaurants (post the grade at the salon);
4. require the use of (a) gloves; (b) filtering masks when buffing or filing nails, or using acrylic; and (c) respirators with cartridges when moving products from large bottles to smaller bottles and cleaning up large spills;
5. increase the frequency of unannounced inspections by city health officials to twice a year; and
6. expand the scope of the inspections to include interviews with salon employees.

Recommendations for state-wide consideration include the licensing of nail salon workers; cross reporting between the Department of Public Health and the Department of Labor; and a wage bond requirement to open a salon.

The level of exploitation we discovered in nail salons is on par with the exploitation we continue to see in our work with day laborers and domestic workers. Granted, not every nail salon owner exploits his workers, but enough seem to, which warrants the creation of a task force. And since a lot of the research of salons has been done without the consistent participation of a cross section of workers and owners, the task force established by HB 5131 will help close that gap.

Thank you.

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#### **Notes**

1. U.S. Department of Labor, "Health Hazards in Nail Salons," downloaded January 17, 2016 from [www.osha.gov](http://www.osha.gov)

